

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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R 031935Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2245
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TD
SUBJECT: SHAKEUP IN THE GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY
OPPOSITION

REF: A) PORT OF SPAIN 1014 (NOTAL)
B) PORT OF SPAIN 1023 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. MARCH 31 SAW EXTENSIVE CHANGES ON BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION SIDES IN PARLIAMENT AS THE EMBATTLED HECTOR MCLEAN RESIGNED BOTH HIS MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIO AND HIS PNM PARTY MEMBERSHIP TO BECOME AN INDEPENDENT MP. HUGH FRANCIS HAS BEEN NAMED TO SUCCEED MCCLEAN AS MINISTER OF WORKS, AND PATRICK MANNING WILL REPLACE FRANCIS AS MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE. IN A SEPARATE ACTION, OPPOSITION LEADER, RAFFIQUE SHAH, AND FIVE ULF SENATORS ALSO RESIGNED, WITH BASDEO PANDAY BEING REAPPOINTED AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION. THE DAC ANNOUNCED THE SUSPENSION FROM THE PARTY OF MAVERICK MP, WINSTON MURRAY. END SUMMARY.

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2. MARCH WENT OUT LIKE A LION ON THE LOCALPOLITICAL SCENE, WITH A FLURRY OF CHANGES OCCURRING ON BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION SIDES IN PARLIAMENT ON MARCH 31. MOST DRAMATIC, PERHAPS, WAS THE RESIGNATION OF HECTOR MCCLEAN AS MINISTER OF WORKS AND FROM THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT. UNDER HEAVY FIRE RECENTLY (REF A), HE DID NOT GIVE REASONS FOR HIS WITH-

DRAWAL BUT STATED THAT HE WOULD REMAIN IN PARLIAMENT AS AN INDEPENDENT MP. HE SAID THAT ANY ATTEMPT, PRESENT OR FUTURE, TO SUGGEST THAT HE HAD RESIGNED HIS SEAT SHOULD "BE TREATED AS VOID AND OF NO EFFECT."

3. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER OR NOT PM WILLIAMS WILL ATTEMPT TO FORCE MCCLEAN OUT OF PARLIAMENT BY MEANS OF ACCEPTING THE UNDATED LETTER OF RESIGNATION WHICH EACH OF THE PARTY'S PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES WAS REQUIRED TO SIGN BEFORE THE 1976 GENERAL ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, ARNOLD THOMASOS, WAS REPORTED ON THE PRESS OF APRIL 1 AS SAYING THAT IN HIS VIEW MCCLEAN WAS AN MP BY VIRTUE OF THE CONSTITUTION, A FACT WHICH OVERRODE ANY PRIVATE ARRANGEMENT MADE PREVIOUSLY WITH THE PARTY OF WHICH HE NO LONGER WAS A MEMBER.

4. THE APPOINTMENT OF HUGH FRANCIS, WHO HAD BEEN ONE OF THE FOUR MINISTERS IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, TO REPLACE MCCLEAN AS MINISTER OF WORKS IS NO SURPRISE. THE 32-YEAR-OLD FRANCIS, WHO RECEIVED HIS FIRST CABINET APPOINTMENT ONLY SIX MONTHS AGO, HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF ALL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS AND PROPERTIES. FRANCIS'S PLACE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE IS BEING FILLED BY PATRICK MANNING, 31, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF WORKS. THIS IS HIS FIRST MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENT. FINALLY, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT THE PORT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IS BEING SHIFTED FROM THE MINISTRY OF WORKS TO THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, WHERE OVERAND PADMORE WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR IT.

5. ON THE OPPOSITION SIDE, RAFFIQUE SHAH OF THE UNITED LABOR FRONT (ULF) TENDERED HIS RESIGNATION AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, AND BASDEO PANDAY, WHO HAD BEEN OPPOSITION LEADER UNTIL OUSTED BY SHAH IN AUGUST, 1977, WAS REAPPOINTED TO THAT POSITION. FIVE OF THE SIX ULF SENATORS (ALLAN ALEXANDER, LENNOX PIERRE, GEORGE SAMMY, GEORGE WEEKES, AND JO YOUNG) ALSO RESIGNED THEIR SEATS, AND PANDAY HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THEIR REPLACEMENTS WILL BE NAMED ON APRIL 3. ALL FIVE HAD SIDED WITH SHAH IN THE ULF LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE. IT APPEARS FROM SHAH'S LETTER OF RESIGNATION THAT PRESIDENT CLARKE HAD DETERMINED THAT CONVICTED ULF MP, BOODRAM JATTAN, COULD NO LONGER BE CONSIDERED AN MP FOR PURPOSES OF DETERMINING WHO SHOULD BE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, THUS SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF ULF MPS TO PANDAY'S FAVOR.

6. FINALLY, THE STRIFE-TORN DEMOCRATIC ACTION CONGRESS (DAC) ANNOUNCED THE INDEFINITE SUSPENSION OF WINSTON

MURRAY, MP, EFFECTIVE MARCH 30. MURRAY, HOWEVER, WAS IN HIS USUAL SEAT IN PARLIAMENT FOR THE MARCH 31 SITTING, AND IT IS NOT CLEAR WHAT PRACTICAL EFFECT, IF ANY, HIS SUSPENSION WILL HAVE. THE DAC'S ACTION AGAINST MURRAY WAS BASED ON HIS "CONDUCT" AND "PUBLIC UTTERANCES SUBVERSIVE TO THE PARTY." MURRAY HAS CALLED ACTION "A JOKE" AND "OF NO EFFECT," SINCE THE MATTER HAD NOT BEEN HANDLED ACCORDING TO THE PARTY CONSTITUTION.

7. COMMENT. OUR PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE IS THAT THE REPLACEMENT OF MCCLEAN BY THE MUCH LESS EXPERIENCED FRANCIS IS UNLIKELY TO IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE TROUBLED MINISTRY OF WORKS. ALTHOUGH HIS NEW APPOINTMENT MEANS A SIGNIFICANT PROMOTION FOR FRANCIS, HE WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY AVOIDING THE PITFALLS WHICH HAVE SWALLOWED UP SO MANY OF HIS PREDECESSORS. MOREOVER, IF WILLIAMS HAD A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PLIABLE CABINET BEFORE MCCLEAN'S DEPARTURE, IT APPEARS TO BE EVEN MORE SO NOW.

8. ON THE OPPOSITION SIDE, THE RETURN OF PANDAY IN THIS LATEST ROUND OF OPPOSITION MUSICAL CHAIRS SEEMS UNLIKELY TO HVE MUCH EFFECT, AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT RUN. WHILE THE POLITICS OF PANDAY'S ULF FACTION HAVE BEEN MORE MODERATE THAN THOSE OF SHAH'S NEITHER FACTION ALONE NOR BOTH TOGETHER COULD PRESENT A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO PNM RULE. THE OPPOSITION'S PUBLIC IMAGE OF FECKLESSNESS IS HIGHLIGHTED FURTHER WHEN THE DAC IS THROWN IN. INDEED, THE CURRENT OPPOSITON PICTURE IS SUCH THAT, AS A "TRINIDAD GUARDIAN" EDITORIAL OF APRIL 1 SUGGESTED, THE GOVERNMENT MAY WELL DECIDE ON NEW ELECTIONS "TO CLEAR UP THE MUDDLE."

9. FINALLY THERE IS THE QUESTION OF WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, MCCLEAN'S ACTIONS MAY HAVE ON A NUMBER OF FORMER PNM STALWARTS WHO HAVE EITHER BEEN FORCED OUT OF PUBLIC LIFE OR SONSGINED BY WILLIAMS TO PARLIAMENTARY OBLIVION. MCCLEAN IS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN CLOSE TO FORMER HEIR APPARENT, KARL HUDSON-PHILLIPS, WHO HAS BEEN KEEPING A LOW PROFILE POLITICALLY BUT WHO PROBABLY STILL IS THE ONLY PUBLIC PERSONALITY IN TRINIDAD WITH SUFFICIENT CHARISMA TO FIGURE AS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO WILLIAMS. HUDSON-PHILLIPS'S ONLY PUBLISHED COMMENT ON THE MCCLEAN AFFAIR WAS AN EXPRESSION OF DEEP REGRET THAT MCCLEAN HAD LEFT THE PNM. IN ANY EVENT, MANY PEOPLE WILL BE WATCHING CAREFULLY TO SEE HOW THE PM DECIDES TO PLAY THE MCCLEAN RESIGNATION AND WHAT MOVES MCCLEAN OR HUDSON-PHILLIPS OR BOTH TOGETHER MAY DECIDE TO MAKE. IF MCCLEAN SUCCEEDS IN REMAINING IN PARLIAMENT, THE WAY WILL BE OPEN FOR OTHER POSSIBLE DEFECTIONS FROM THE PNM. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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Message Attributes

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